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AUTHOR Phillips, Elaine M.
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ABSTRACT

A study of communication anxiety in second language learning investigated: (1) the role of four factors (sex, language learning experience, language studied, and confidence) in student apprehension about speaking in the classroom; and (2) students' stated reactions to speaking. Subjects were 101 college students in 4 intact French, Spanish, and German classes. A questionnaire called the Measure of Speaking Apprehension, developed by the experimenter and based on a writing apprehension instrument, contained 30 statements about classroom activities, to which students responded on a 5-point affective scale. Responses to questionnaire statements are presented for each language group and for the total group. Results suggest that previous language learning experience, sex, and language studied are minimally related to anxiety, and confidence was found to be only moderately related. Analysis of responses to specific classroom activities revealed support for certain activities and suggested ambivalence or unfamiliarity with others. Responses to questions concerning evaluation suggest a high level of student confidence. Reactions to statements of non-specific anxiety suggest that educators should become more aware of student anxiety. Pair and small-group work, more frequent exposure to oral evaluation, and helping students establish reasonable goals are suggested to reduce apprehension. (MSE)

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Anxiety and Speaking in the Foreign Language Classroom

ELAINE M. PHILLIPS

The role of affective variables in foreign and second language learning has, for some time, been deemed as worthy of study as have cognitive variables in language acquisition research (see Brown, 1980, for example). Indeed, Bailey (1983) believes that

> for many people involved in language teaching and learning, the hypothesis that the affective domain is significant in second language learning is intuitively sound. It is a widely held belief that *what the learner experiences in a language lesson* [emphasis added] is as important as the teaching method, the sequence of presentation, or the instructional materials. (p.71)

Several affective variables such a attitude and motivation (Gardner and Lambert, 1972), self-esteem (Heyde, 1979), inhibition and empathy (Guiora, 1972), introversion and extroversion (Naiman, Frölich, and Stern, 1975), aggression (Laforge, 1971), and anxiety (Gardner, Smythe, and Brunet, 1976; Gardner, et al., 1977; Tucker, Hamayan, and Genesee, 1976; Steinberg, 1982; Young, 1985; Scott, 1986) have been identified and researched.

Though the significance of these affective variables has yet to be definitively established, the importance of foreign language classroom anxiety has been underscored in the last two decades by the large role it has played in the development of new language teaching approaches. Asher (1977), for example, found the language classroom environment so stressful that he developed a teaching technique known as Total Physical Response (TPR) which allows the student a lengthy "silent period" where the majority of responses in the early stages of learning are physical rather than oral. Likewise, Terrell (1982) devised the Natural Approach, in part an attempt to reduce anxiety, which begins by permitting the learner to respond in the native language or with a shake or nod of the head or with simple one or two word responses. Other perhaps less commonly utilized methods such as the Silent Way (Gattegno, 1976), Community Language Learning (Curran, 1976) and Suggestopoedia (Lozanov, 1978) also actively attempt to speed

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language acquisition by creating a low stress environment in the classroom.

Paralleling the developing interest in reducing the anxiety levels of language students has been a growing concern with oral proficiency. New teaching methodologies and the oral proficiency/communicative competence movement have resulted in changes in the instructional focus of many language classrooms. Rather than centering language instruction primarily on memorization, pattern drills, and grammatical explanations, more and more, teachers are stressing functional language use and are providing additional opportunity for practice in communicative activities. This shift in emphasis poses a paradox, however, for while it is the oral skill that most interests language students (Lindenau, 1987), speaking in the foreign language also causes students the most anxiety (Price, forthcoming).

The interest in anxiety as it relates to language learning and the oral skill is intuitively sound to most language teachers who can readily identify anxious learners who have been in their classes. These are the students who sit in the back of the room, attempt to hide in their seats, never volunteer, and when called upon, respond in a barely audible whisper. They may be frequently absent from class, often neglecting to turn in homework. The importance of anxiety in language learning is not only intuitively sound; it is also supported by the research. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), for instance, found the problem of anxiety in the language classroom so widespread that over a third of the students they surveyed were concerned enough about their language classes to volunteer to attend special sessions aimed at reducing anxiety through group support. In addition, they found that students were especially concerned about the oral component of the class as evidenced by considerable agreement with such statements as "I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language class," "I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class," and "Even if I am well prepared for the class, I feel anxious about it."

Several other studies verify the findings of Horwitz et al. For example, Price's report (forthcoming) of interviews with fifteen highly anxious ex-foreign language students indicates that *all* of the learners felt that speaking in the language in class had been the greatest cause of anxiety. They feared "being laughed at," "making fools of themselves," and "being ridiculed." One student who never managed to say a word in class but practiced religiously in her room confessed regretfully, "You knew that you were never, never going

to be able to say it like he [the teacher] did . . . you were going to fail at pronouncing those words." In another study of foreign language classroom anxiety (Young, forthcoming), a survey found that some activities were more stressful than others, especially speaking in front of the class and impromptu role-playing. Bailey's diary studies (1983), on the other hand, let the students' own words reveal the intensity of their emotions:

> I floundered through the class, making at least four stupid mistakes out loud. I felt so lost! . . . Today my palms were sweating and I was chewing my lip through the entire class. (p. 75)

> I notice that I still continue to stutter quite a bit—a problem I don't seem to have in English. It's usually (perhaps always) when I'm called upon for a one-sentence response. I tend to get very nervous and it takes me a few seconds before I can even start to speak, even when it's a relatively simple task or phrase. I'm obviously very afraid to make a mistake in front of the class. (Lynch, in Bailey, p. 82)

Finally, the beliefs about language learning that students bring with them to class may also contribute to their anxiety about language learning. Horwitz (1988), for instance, found 40-68% of the subjects felt that speaking with an excellent accent, no simple task, was very important. Price's subjects, likewise, recalled the embarrassment of mispronouncing "at our age" and the shame of "their Texas accents."

Although these studies appear to establish the oral skill as predominant in provoking foreign language classroom anxiety, other questions remain to be examined. What, for instance, is the relationship between foreign language classroom anxiety and the sex of the language learner? Does past experience with foreign/second language learning influence the learner's expression of anxiety? Is anxiety related to the language studied? Do students who express confidence in their ability to succeed at language learning feel less anxious in the classroom? To search for answers to these questions, the present study looks, in part, at four factors (sex, language learning experience, language studied, and confidence) because of the ease with which these elements might be used to identify anxious learners and because teachers may believe instinctively that they are related to classroom anxiety. The second part of the study is devoted to an analysis of the subjects' responses to a questionnaire bearing on their affective reactions to speaking the foreign language.

PROCEDURE

Information related to subjects' attitudes and feelings about speaking in the foreign language class was gathered from a self-report questionnaire administered during the third week of the semester. Additional information collected concerned the subjects' language background, sex, and expectations for success in the language class.

Subjects

The subjects for this study were first semester language students at a small, private, church-affiliated university in the Southwest. The questionnaire was administered during the third week of class to 101 subjects in four intact language classes: two French classes (N=41), one Spanish class (N=35), and one German class (N=25). The researcher was the instructor for one of the French classes, approximately half of the French subjects, and the other classes were taught by different professors. There were 56 females and 45 males in the study. The large majority of subjects were taking language classes to fulfill general education requirements. Though participation in the study was entirely voluntary, no students refused to participate.

Instrument

A questionnaire, the Measure of Speaking Apprehension (MSA), was devised by the experimenter, based upon the Daly-Miller Test (DMT), a measure of writing apprehension (Daly and Miller, 1975) and was adapted to measure subjects' anxiety as it relates to speaking in a foreign language classroom. The original instrument, the DMT, obtained a reliability coefficient of .94 using a split-halves technique and a test-retest reliability over a week of .92. A predictive validity study found that subjects high in writing apprehension had occupations with writing requirements that differed significantly from the moderate and low anxiety groups; that is, the measure effectively predicted Ss who avoided occupations requiring considerable writing.

The revised instrument used in the current study (MSA) contains 30 statements to which subjects respond on a scale from 1 to 5 (strongly agree to strongly disagree). Scores could thus range from

30 to 150 with a higher score indicating a higher level of anxiety. Twenty-three statements were retained from the DMT, preserving as closely as possible the substance and form of those on the original measure, changing the skill (from written to oral) and adapting the context to the foreign language classroom. Seven statements were added to the questionnaire, primarily to address specific activities common in language classes. An internal reliability analysis was conducted on the MSA (Kronbach's Alpha Coefficient) revealing a reliability of 0.95 (N=101). The test-retest reliability studies are in progress. In sum, both the measure on which the MSA was based and the MSA itself appear to be reliable. In addition, an analysis of the revised statements reveal high content validity; they appear to successfully represent the construct. No other validity studies have been conducted to date.

DATA ANALYSIS OF PREDICTOR VARIABLES

Several statistical procedures were used to analyze the data related to four predictor variables: language background, language studied, sex of learner, and learner confidence in ability to succeed in language class. First, several correlations were computed to examine the relationship between anxiety and the predictor variables. The subject's total score on the MSA was correlated with years of previous language study ($r = -.19$, $p = <.03$), a question predicting success in language class ($r = .47$, $p = <.000$), and sex (NS).

Next, the mean anxiety scores on the MSA for the entire population (total) and for the individual language groups (French, German, Spanish) were computed. The total mean on the instrument was 82.4 ($SD = 20.8$). A one-way ANOVA revealed no two language groups were significantly different at the .05 level; i.e., based on language group mean scores, subjects in one language were no more or less anxious than those in another.

Finally, subjects were placed in high (HA), moderate (MA), and low anxiety (LA) groups based on their total score on the MSA. One SD above and below the population mean was used as the cut off point in group assignment. subjects scoring 61 to 103 were assigned to the MA group, those scoring below 61, to the LA group, and those scoring above 103 to the high anxiety group. A chi-square statistic was used to examine the relationship of the anxiety groups with the language groups. No significant differences were found using this procedure, nor did a Pearson's correlation

find a significant relationship between anxiety group and language group. In addition, anxiety group classification was correlated with years of previous language study (r = -.29, p = <.002), prediction of success (r = .26, p= <.005), language group (NS), and sex (NS).

RESULTS FROM QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES

In addition to a general survey of speaking apprehension, the questionnaire was designed to obtain information about subjects' affective reactions to various classroom activities and to oral evaluation. This information was considered valuable because, with the current interest in developing oral competence, more and more students may encounter communicative exercises and oral assessment. The statements from the survey have been grouped into three categories: classroom activities, evaluation, and non-specific expressions of anxiety. Responses to the statements are presented below, and a discussion of the responses may be found in the subsequent section.

Classroom Activities

The following statements are associated with specific oral activities in the language classroom:

#15. Standing in front of the class to speak makes me very uncomfortable.

	FRE	SPN	GER	Total(%)
agree	32	66	60	51
uncertain	10	14	8	11
disagree	59	20	32	39

#17 I feel confident doing oral class exercises.

agree	59	49	52	54
uncertain	12	20	4	13
disagree	29	31	44	34

#18 I have fun when we role-play situations in class.

agree	61	37	72	46
uncertain	12	37	24	28
disagree	27	26	4	27

#20 I feel uncomfortable doing oral work in small groups.

agree	15	3	12	20
uncertain	10	43	48	31
disagree	76	54	40	59

#33 I enjoy doing oral work with a partner.

agree	66	52	52	58
uncertain	12	37	32	26
disagree	22	11	16	17

Evaluation

The following statements deal with the subjects' feelings toward evaluation of their oral performance including teacher evaluation, peer evaluation, and self evaluation.

#9 I have no fear of having my speaking evaluated.

agree	41	57	32	48
uncertain	2	11	8	7
disagree	49	32	60	46

#11 I am afraid to speak when I know my speech will be evaluated.

agree	39	34	36	37
uncertain	10	9	8	9
disagree	53	57	56	55

#24 I expect to do poorly on oral tests even before I take them.

agree	5	14	16	11
uncertain	15	14	28	18
disagree	80	71	56	71

#25 I like hearing myself speak in the foreign language.

agree	71	51	60	61
uncertain	10	29	20	19
disagree	20	20	20	20

#26 Discussing my speaking ability with others is an enjoyable experience.

agree	24	26	32	27
uncertain	46	54	48	50
disagree	29	20	20	24

#28 When I have to perform orally, I know I am going to do poorly.

agree	5	14	12	20
uncertain	5	14	8	9
disagree	90	72	80	81

#30 I don't think I speak as well as most other people in the class.

agree	46	34	24	37
uncertain	20	27	16	22
disagree	34	37	60	42

#31 I don't like to have my speaking evaluated.

agree	29	37	36	34
uncertain	12	11	4	10
disagree	59	51	60	57

#32 I am not good at speaking the foreign language.

agree	24	29	32	28
uncertain	27	26	8	22
disagree	49	46	60	51

#35 I like to have my friends hear me speak the foreign language.

agree	47	31	48	42
uncertain	32	34	20	30
disagree	22	34	32	29

Non-Specific Expressions of Anxiety

The remaining statements are related to non-specific feelings of anxiety about speaking the foreign language.

#8 I avoid speaking in class.				
agree	15	17	40	22
uncertain	5	9	0	5
disagree	80	74	60	73
#10 I look forward to expressing myself out loud.				
agree	56	43	36	47
uncertain	17	23	16	19
disagree	27	35	48	35
#12 Taking a foreign language class where I must speak is a very frightening experience.				
agree	17	23	28	22
uncertain	2	6	4	4
disagree	81	72	68	74
#13 Doing oral classwork makes me feel good.				
agree	59	46	32	48
uncertain	17	26	20	21
disagree	25	29	48	32
#14 My mind seems to go blank when I try to speak.				
agree	34	37	40	37
uncertain	15	6	0	8
disagree	51	57	60	57
#16 I like to express myself aloud in the foreign language.				
agree	59	34	36	45
uncertain	7	29	8	15
disagree	34	37	56	41
#19 I am nervous about speaking in class.				
agree	49	57	48	52
uncertain	5	6	0	4
disagree	46	37	52	45
#21 Speaking in class is the activity I enjoy most.				
agree	49	26	36	38
uncertain	12	23	8	15
disagree	39	51	56	48

#22 I never seem able to express myself clearly in the foreign language.

agree	32	29	28	30
uncertain	17	17	20	18
disagree	51	55	52	53

#23 Speaking in class is a lot of fun.

agree	61	32	36	45
uncertain	12	20	16	16
disagree	27	49	48	40

#27 I have a terrible time expressing myself orally in the foreign language.

agree	17	34	20	24
uncertain	15	11	4	11
disagree	68	54	76	65

#29 It is easy for me to speak in class.

agree	44	37	32	39
uncertain	22	20	16	20
disagree	34	43	52	42

#34 I freeze up when the teacher calls on me to give an oral response.

agree	27	38	32	32
uncertain	20	3	8	7
disagree	64	60	60	61

#36 I would like it if we spoke more often in class.

agree	52	29	28	38
uncertain	15	31	32	25
disagree	34	40	40	38

#37 I would be interested in taking a conversation course in the foreign language.

agree	66	49	52	56
uncertain	17	17	24	29
disagree	17	34	24	25

DISCUSSION

The correlations, chi square, and analysis of variance computed using the predictor variables in the study are most significant in their failure to confirm common expectations. While intuition might lead one to assume that increased experience in language learning would reduce anxiety, correlations indicate only a very slight (-.19 to -.29) negative relationship between anxiety and previous language study which, although significant, accounts for a mere 4-9% of the shared variance. Basically the same may be said of the relationship between anxiety and the subjects' predictions of success in the language classroom. Though one might expect confidence to be associated positively with low anxiety, only moderate (.26 to .47) correlations were revealed, accounting for 7-22% of the shared variance. No significant relationships were found between anxiety and language studied or sex of the learner. Thus, none of the predictor variables appear highly useful in identifying anxious learners. Consequently, a teacher may not assume that students of Spanish, for example, are more prone to anxiety nor that females are more likely than males to be apprehensive in the language class. Foreign language classroom anxiety related to the speaking skill, it seems, is non-selective, affecting subjects in all languages studied, males and females, the confident and not-so-confident, experienced students as well as inexperienced ones. What these findings imply for the language teacher is that the help of devices such as the MSA, rather than intuition alone, may be needed to identify the anxious learner.

The second objective of the study was to analyze subjects' responses to questions related to classroom activities, of upmost importance due to the implications for the communicative approach to language teaching and learning. In the first category of statements related to classroom exercises, a majority of subjects expressed favorable reactions to activities that could be considered proficiency-oriented or student-centered such as group and partner work. Only role-play failed to achieve a 50% approval rate, though it was not far off the mark at 46%. On the other hand, 51% of the subjects expressed discomfort with more traditional and ego-involving activities such as speaking in front of the class but not with oral exercises. Because of their more structured nature and limited

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response-type, however, it is *not* surprising that 54% of the subjects felt confident with traditional classroom drills.

Nevertheless, what is most striking in the findings is perhaps the large number of subjects who responded "uncertain" to the statements related to role-play, group, and partner work. The total percent of "uncertain" responses for these three statements ranged from 26-31%, but the total seemed to be skewed by the responses from the French group. Without their responses, "uncertain" answers would have ranged from 30-45%. While it is possible the responses indicate an ambivalence on the part of the subjects toward the activities, it is more likely they reveal an unfamiliarity with these activities. In fact, discussion with the Spanish and German professors indicated the activities had not been utilized in the classes at the time the survey was administered. If these subjects' unfamiliarity with student-centered activities is taken into consideration along with the relatively low percentage of subjects expressing anxiety related to them, the positive response may then be viewed in an even more favorable light; i.e., one might project a higher percentage of positive reactions had all subjects been familiar with the activities. The support received for student-centered activities at the very least suggests they are worthy of consideration by language teachers.

A second group of statement responses concerned subjects' feelings about evaluation of the oral skill. While some statements reflected concern with teacher evaluation (testing), others dealt with the reactions of classmates and friends or self-assessment of the subject's speaking ability.

The most noteworthy response from the reactions related to evaluation suggests that the subjects in this study were highly confident. In spite of the fact that 37-46% of the subjects indicated a fear of oral testing, only 10-11% of them expected to do poorly on an oral exam. This discrepancy may indeed be due to high confidence, though other factors could also have played a role. The reactions may, for example, reflect considerable experience with oral testing (92% of the subjects had studied a foreign language before) or, on the other hand, inexperience with speaking tests (the survey was administered the third week of class and subjects were not queried about their past experience with oral assessment). Another factor that might have influenced subjects' responses may have been an expectation, right or wrong, that the teacher would give students the benefit of the doubt in an oral test situation seen as more subjective than a written exam. In any case, speculation needs to be

supplemented by research soliciting information from subjects about their past experience with oral evaluation and the reasoning behind their responses. The fact remains, however, that many students fear oral assessment, and teachers and researchers would be well advised to seek means of alleviating students anxiety in this regard, especially in light of the uncertainty about the relationship of anxiety and achievement (Steinberg, 1982; Young, 1985; Scott, 1986).

Finally, the remaining statements elicited non-specific expressions of anxiety from the subjects. Since research has uncovered the paradox of students who enjoy speaking in the foreign language even though they also fear it, it is not surprising that upwards of 45% of the subjects gave favorable reactions to statements concerning the speaking skill. However, while educators may take comfort in these numbers, let us not overlook the 30-52% who do *not* look forward to, enjoy, or feel good about speaking aloud (questions 10, 13, 16, 21, 23, 36), who get nervous or tend to freeze up (questions 14, 19, 34), and who do not find it easy to express themselves in the foreign language (questions 22, 29). While learners' reactions may be due largely to unrealistic beliefs or expectations, educators must become more aware of students' anxiety since it can be pivotal in their reactions to the total language learning experience.

CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The results of this study found, as did Horwitz (1988), considerable agreement among students in French, German, and Spanish classes. Though answers from subjects in one language group or another varied considerably on a few questions, responses were, on the whole, quite similar, and no statistical differences were found in anxiety levels of language groups. However, consideration must be given to the characteristics of the sample (non-random; students at a small, private university) and to the cross-sectional nature of the survey before the findings may be extrapolated.

While the results, fortunately, do not indicate an overwhelming number of students experiencing high levels of foreign language classroom anxiety, they do suggest that considerable attention could still be devoted to addressing the anxiety issue. First, since many students express comfort related to pair and small-group work, this type activity shows promise as a means of lowering classroom

stress. Second, more frequent exposure (familiarity) to oral evaluation might reduce the anxiety experienced in relation to assessment even by those who appear confident in their ability. Finally, helping students establish reasonable goals and reassuring them that errors are a normal part of the foreign/second language learning process might help the 30+% who are less than thrilled at the prospect of speaking in the language class.

In addition to studies pinpointing the oral skill, research is also needed that compares students' reactions to activities and assessment in speaking with their feelings about the other skill areas. This information would provide a basis for comparison and would allow a more accurate analysis of the seriousness of anxiety and the oral skill. If the current interest in oral proficiency/communicative competence continues, it is certain that research aimed at identifying anxious learners and alleviating foreign language classroom anxiety should be utilized to encourage students to continue language study beyond the level of lower-division courses.

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